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Software, graphics integration key to future office system

Pioneer users of office automation products frequently must undergo a wrenching experience to replace a manual operation. Often, the benefit is only partial at that, such as a word processor that focuses on only part of a business' needs. Its functions remain isolated from other automated facilities.

Such shortcomings, however, will not exist in future office automation systems, according to a report produced by Frost & Sullivan, Inc., New York.

The two drawbacks—incompleteness and isolation—in current office automation attempts "define precisely" how future office technology will evolve, says the report, entitled, "Future Office Systems, Equipment, and Associated Software Markets."

The report perceives the current, piecemeal office automation approaches as "a first step that will last through 1984". But, then, during the second half of the 1980 decade, true office integrated information systems will "begin to take hold."

Word processing, facsimile, data processing, and other individual markets will gradually dry up to be replaced by general solution hardware.

By mid-1980, an office automation system will have to offer a broad range of facilities to be successful, such as text editing, report formatting, teleconferencing, mail calendar, on-line data access, statistical analysis, modelling, project management, dictation, telephone services, document and information retrieval, dictionary, encyclopedia, etc.

The hardware components necessary to bring off integrated systems are already available states the report. Software, on the other hand is "the primary bottleneck," an aspect of office automation that is rarely treated in sufficient detail.

F&S finds three fundamental challenges facing software applied to automated office systems: Making systems (1) adaptable to changing user needs, (2) suitable for extensive customization, and (3) conform to existing office practices rather than vice-versa.

What will be necessary to achieve all of this is "a new type of system architecture, a new kind of implementation language, and a new class of software tools." □

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